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SUBJECT: LESOTHO: AMB CHAVEAS VISITS, INJECTS REALITY INTO AFRICOM DEBATE

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THIS IS A RETRANSMISSION OF A MESSAGE SENT ORIGINALLY ON OCTOBER 3, 2007.

11. (U) SUMMARY: During a September 20-23 visit to Lesotho, Director of the Department of Defense's Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) Ambassador Peter Chaveas (ret.) disseminated useful information concerning AFRICOM and ACSS to a range of high-level GOL officials. Chaveas met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Defense and National Security, and the Commander of the Lesotho Defense Force (LDF). Ambassador Chaveas also briefed ACSS alumni in Lesotho. Ambassador Chaveas's timely information concerning AFRICOM helped dispel various rumors and misinformation about the new command, though more work on this front remains. END SUMMARY.

PS Defense: Information Gap on AFRICOM

12. (U) At his meeting with Principal Secretary (PS) of Defense and National Security Mahali Lebesa, Ambassador Chaveas discussed the current activities of ACSS and future training opportunities for Lesotho's Defense Ministry and armed forces. (NOTE: Lebesa reports directly to Prime Minister Mosisili, who also serves as Minister of Defense. END NOTE.) He then briefed Lebesa on the establishment of AFRICOM, the new U.S. military regional command, pointing out that: 1) The USG wished to eventually place AFRICOM Headquarters on the African continent, but would only do so if invited by a host African nation; 2) placing AFRICOM's headquarters on African soil did not imply a deployment of combat troops in Africa; and 3) the establishment of AFRICOM was primarily an internal DoD reorganization to bring more U.S. focus and continuity to Africa-related issues.

13. (SBU) In response, Lebesa thanked Chaveas for clarifying the concept of AFRICOM. She pointed to a large information shortfall on the intentions and nature of AFRICOM. She stated that due to this lack of information, there were negative views expressed on AFRICOM by Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states at their recent security meetings. Lebesa indicated that most SADC countries believed that there would be an actual presence of U.S. combat troops on the African continent, raising a number of concerns. She informed Ambassador Chaveas that the AFRICOM issue was still a matter for discussion within SADC, and that the regional organization had taken no concrete decisions. Lebesa again thanked Chaveas for his briefing and noted that she was in a better position to advise the Prime Minister on AFRICOM. Observing that Lesotho had sent a representative to a September 22-24 USG brief on AFRICOM in Virginia, Lebesa concluded that she expected imminent

opportunities for GOL deliberation on its position regarding the new command.

LDF Commander: We're Positive on AFRICOM, They're Not

14. (U) At a separate meeting, Charge introduced Ambassador Chaveas to LDF Commander Lieutenant General Thuso Motanyane and thanked the General for his swift action in releasing a senior LDF officer to participate in the USG AFRICOM briefing. Ambassador Chaveas briefed the Commander on ACSS training opportunities before moving the discussion to AFRICOM. Pointing out that African countries currently fall under three separate regional commands, Chaveas argued that AFRICOM could, in the long term, bring more resources and a more coordinated approach to the African continent. The Director informed Motanyane that the DOD's internal reorganization through the establishment of AFRICOM would not bring combat troops to or build military bases on African soil, and that any placement of a headquarters element on the African continent would strictly respect national sovereignty.

15. (SBU) General Motanyane stated his SADC counterparts held misconceptions about the nature of AFRICOM and that many countries were thus not agreeable to the concept. He mentioned that AFRICOM was viewed as similar to the Africa Endeavor military exercise which "excluded SADC member states such as Zimbabwe," and therefore were not in the spirit of regional cooperation. Motanyane also mentioned that AFRICOM was still an issue under deliberation in regional bodies. The LDF Commander nonetheless stated that Lesotho's military regarded the establishment of AFRICOM positively because it would strengthen U.S.-Africa security cooperation and improve lines of communication -- including with Lesotho.

Foreign Minister: Thanks for Coming

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16. (SBU) Ambassador Chaveas also briefed Foreign Minister Kenneth Tsekoe on AFRICOM, stressing the same points as in previous briefings. Tsekoe thanked Chaveas for his briefing, but in contrast to Lebesa and Motanyane, did not appear to have been briefed previously on the AFRICOM issue in any great detail. Nonetheless, the two help a fruitful discussion on the overall bilateral U.S.-Lesotho bilateral relationship.

Alumni Reunion

17. (SBU) Ambassador Chaveas held an evening briefing for ACSS alumni, focusing both on the ongoing activities of ACSS and AFRICOM developments. The briefing was followed by a short but lively question and answer session. Following the briefing, the Charge d' Affaires and Director Chaveas hosted a reception attended by Lesotho ACSS alumni including senior LDF officers, senior National Security Service (NSS) members, and senior civil servants from the Ministry of Defense and National Security. In addition, members of the Diplomatic Corps, the Commissioner of Police, the LDF Chief of Staff for Operations, and the Head of the Indian Army Training Team attended. At the reception, the Chinese Ambassador showed a high level of interest in the preceding briefing and asked for printouts of Chaveas's PowerPoint presentation.

A Useful Visit

18. (SBU) COMMENT: Ambassador Chaveas's Basotho interlocutors appeared highly interested though not well informed about the nature and intent of AFRICOM. Ambassador Chaveas's program in

Lesotho was very useful in the regard, as it injected hard facts into a conversation more typically dominated by innuendo about the United States' motivations for establishing AFRICOM. We look forward to continuing this dialogue with Lesotho's defense establishment in the coming months. Equipped with a proper understanding of USG intentions and plans, Lesotho could play a helpful role within the region in mitigating some of the criticism and misunderstandings regarding AFRICOM. END COMMENT.

¶9. (U) Ambassador Chaveas departed Lesotho prior to clearing this cable.

NOLAN